

ENLIGHTENMENT

At last
enlightenment
comes with a blinding truth:
some things are possible and some
are not.

-- Raymond Tong

Bristol, Avon, England

THE PASADENA FREEWAY

Originally Arroyo Seco Parkway, you were the first freeway in Los Angeles. This inspires hatred in shortsighted people who see you as merely the crucible of noxious progress, but others value your originality and pioneer status. We come to drive at all hours and we come alone, single peas in restless pods.

Because you wind like Ferndell's nature trails, you are the safest of all the freeways, not like those whose exit speeds are measured in g's. And the air quality is so sensational that careless drivers plunge into pollution as into huge, dingy marshmallows and are safe.

Of course you are cosmopolitan. Conceived in the Crown City, you glide ever downward, through a smudged and mysterious barrio which you divide like a blade. All along the way, people have sprayed their names. El Grande Jacinto is everywhere, and blue-eyed commuters wonder if the giant hyacinth will ever stalk their pretty streets.

Then you skirt Chavez Ravine which hides a band of men who steal and run for a living. They do not have an epic name like Giants or a pious one like Padres, but they are called something dear to the heart of every motorist: Dodgers.

Mostly, then, you are lost in the badlands of downtown or you plunge gratefully into the cool Harbor Frwy. Sunset Boulevard at the unfashionable end takes a little of the action plus Hill St. leading into Chinatown, kingdom of the No. 4 dinner.

You are the pioneer freeway, reminder in your sinuousness of the pastoral days of concrete, beloved to those of us who drive. And who doesn't! When we are trapped on the San Diego, Santa Monica, San Berdoo, Harbor, Foothill, Santa Ana Freeways, we long to lift our eyes and know that home is just across the dry arroyo that was your maiden name until -- like everyone else here -- you changed it, honoring the city you wear on your long and lovely self like a sprawling trinket.

Oh, Pasadena Freeway, we have loved you from the beginning, all of us who soon after Johnny's monologue raise our hands as if we were holding the sacred wheel and in our dreams negotiate your movie star curves all night long.

ON BEAUTY

It is conceivable The Incredible Melting Man just wants to get out of those wet clothes. But not likely: 2000 frames ago he saw himself in a mirror of standing water and knew he would never be held again or kissed goodnight by even the scuzziest.

I couldn't resist his loneliness, so during commercials I imagine an escape to Green Bay. The weather is superb. He gets a room, a Frigidaire, some rubber jeans. It is just another brand of grief: He likes this girl at the ice cream store but Spring threatens and during solitary sex his hand sticks to himself. She would scream like all the others and by June he'd be nothing but a raging pomade.

I know what's coming: high voltage wires ruled against the dawn. Good. Monsters should not live on. A rampage that lasts for years is just a job. And what's he to become, The Incredible Puddle?

Better let them lure you toward the transformer. Your lot is to be dreadful and to fry so that those of us who survive these long nights can sleep at last and dream the handsome dream and wake once more restored.